DILEXIT NOS (HE LOVED US)

Reflecting with Pope Francis in Chapter 1

Pope Francis' ministry was grounded in a deep experience of the love of Christ. This reflection is inspired by Pope Francis' reflections in chapter 1 of Dilexit Nos (He Loved Us).

In our modern world, we exist at a frenetic pace: we rush from here to there. There is always a list of things to do, a task to accomplish, and breaking news to follow. It can be difficult to stay focused on anything for very long, and our interactions can at times become superficial, efficient, or transactional.

Yet, this isn't who we are; it isn't what we crave. What we really long for is relationship. What we most deeply desire is a return to the heart.

In *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis invites us to pause and recognize our deep longing for love.

Pausing from the frenetic pace of life frees us to connect at the level of the heart. It gives us an opportunity to see that our core and essence lie in the heart: not in the intellect, or in achievement, productivity, popularity, or anything else on which we base our worth. No: my value and yours—and everyone's—comes from the heart; from the truth that he loves us. When we truly know this, it will change us.

This time of prayer is an opportunity to carve out a space to enter into quiet and stillness, where we can know: he loves us. If you are sitting in a quiet chapel, or in your room, or in a car or bus, it is possible to become quiet within yourself and with the Lord.

Begin by positioning your body in a manner that is comfortable but alert. Uncross your legs or arms and if possible, place your feet on the floor, make your back straight and rest your hands on your knees.

In the stillness, take account of your body: Where are you tense? Where do your muscles feel tight? Notice with attention and relax that tightness. Next, take a deep, slow breath, until your lungs

are full, and then slowly let that breath out. Repeat this several times. In.... and out. Focus on the simple act—the miracle—of breath in and out.

Now we will turn to opening our hearts to Christ's love.

In the quiet of your heart, recognize the yearning that you have—that we all have—from deep within, to return to the heart; to be in the presence of the one who loves us. That yearning, that longing and desire for Christ's presence, is in and of itself a prayer.

In the stillness, ask Christ to make you aware of his presence, which is constant and true. Ask for the awareness of his deep and unyielding love.

Rest in his love; it is a love that is for you, his precious child. Allow Christ's love to surround you, allow his presence to be within you. How does his presence change you? How does it matter that he loves *you?*

The entire world, including all its people, are within the heart of Christ. How does it matter that he loves *us?*

Spend as long as you like in this space of quiet stillness, in your *desire* for the heart of Christ, in your *awareness* of the heart of Christ—loving you, loving all, loving the world, and loving all people in the midst of their challenges and heartbreaking struggles. All of these are in the heart of Christ.

Continue to sit in the heart of Christ.

When you are ready, end with this prayer of Pope Francis in *Dilexit Nos*:

> **"In the presence of the heart of Christ, I once more ask the Lord to have mercy on this suffering world in which he chose to dwell as one of us. May he pour out the treasures of his light and love, so that our world, which presses forward despite wars, socio-economic disparities and uses of technology that threaten our humanity, may regain the most important and necessary thing of all: its heart (no. 31)."**

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Secretariat of Justice and Peace

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